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AUTHOR Nading, Robert M.
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ABSTRACT

Interpretation analysis is a new and interesting event on the forensics horizon which appears to be attracting an ever larger number of supporters. This event, developed by Larry Lambert of Ball State University in 1989, requires a student to perform all three disciplines of forensic competition (interpretation, public speaking, and limited preparation) within one event. Interpretation analysis challenges students and allows them to demonstrate their ability to adapt to various communication contexts, by first placing the student in the role/context of an interpreter, then into the role/context of a communicator, and finally into the role of a respondent to a question. Furthermore, the abilities tested by this event can be tested neither by the literary criticism nor the program oral interpretation events. While the use of questions in forensics events is controversial, their potential for abuse would be reduced by having tournament directors do a better job of screening judges for the event, and making their use optional. Interpretation analysis is not an event in which all students can, or even should, participate. But for those students who seek a challenge, this event can provide an excellent opportunity to showcase a number of varied talents. (Two appendixes containing, respectively, information given to interpretation analysis judges at Ball State University and rules for interpretation analysis used by the Morehead State University Eagle Championships are attached.) (PRA)

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Interpretation Analysis as a Competitive Event

Robert M. Nading

Eastern Illinois University

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INTRODUCTION

Many local individual event tournaments are content to offer only the "usual" events that are also offered by the major national tournaments. However, there are a significant number of local tournaments that are willing to experiment and expand the bounds of forensic offerings and practices. The 1991 Intercollegiate Speech Tournament Results book lists 54 different events that were offered by at least one tournament during the 1990-91 forensic season.[1] Many of these events are offered simply for their amusement value or to provide a break from the normal tournament routine. While there certainly is nothing wrong with amusement value in forensic events, very little thought is often given to the educational value of such "unusual" events. Fortunately, these events remain confined to one or two tournaments throughout the country and don't amass a very large amount of interest or following throughout the forensic community.

One event that has gained increasing interest and support over the past few years is Interpretation Analysis. Described succinctly, this event requires a student to perform all three disciplines of forensic competition (interpretation, public speaking, and limited preparation) within one event. This paper will examine the viability of Interpretation Analysis as a

competitive event by first looking at the background and rules of the event. Secondly, this paper will examine the rationale/justification for such an event. And finally, this paper will examine some random thoughts and questions regarding the event which have arisen during the author's two-year exposure to this event as a coach/judge/tournament director of the event.

BACKGROUND/RULES OF THE EVENT

The Interpretation Analysis event was developed by Larry Lambert of Ball State University in 1989. His tournament has offered the event for the past three years. Morehead State University picked up the event and offered it at their Eagle Championships in both 1990 and 1991. The event was also offered at the Russell Martin Tournament hosted by Cornell University during the 1990-91 forensic season and at the Eastern Illinois University "End of Summer" Tournament held in September, 1991.[2]

The rules for the event as it is offered by Ball State University (a full copy of the rules and instructions to I.A. judges can be found in Appendix A) stipulate that the event will include:

> [4 minute maximum interp; 4 minute maximum public address; 2 minute maximum impromptu Q & A] Students will present an interpretation selection from any of the three major genres.

> After the selection, students will provide an original speech analyzing the interpretive choices in the selection. This analysis may be made in terms of historical background, technique, pedagogical value, or any other means used to bring life to the selection. A session will follow in which the judges may bring the ballot to life through a question and answer exchange with the contestant. Remaining Q & A time (if available) will be opened to audience members.[3]

The rules used by Morehead University contain only slight modifications (a complete set of the Morehead University rules can be found in Appendix B):

1. They stipulate that the interp selection must have literary merit.
2. They stipulate that the use of a manuscript is required.
3. They stipulate that the public speaking section of the event must conform to the "standard format of introduction, body, and conclusion."
4. They stipulate that if the contestant doesn't use one of the methods specifically mentioned in the rules as a basis for analysis, they must use "any other means of literary and/or performance criticism."[4]

The first three of these deviations in the rules are relatively minor. However, the fourth requirement which stipulates that students must use a "means of literary and/or

performance criticism" in the analysis section of the event has had some important implications which will be discussed later in this paper.

Student and coach interest in the event has been growing at a steady pace. The average entry size for the event at the Ball State Tournament is 20 contestants, compared to an average size of approximately 25 contestants for all of the "usual" AFA events. At the Eastern Illinois University Tournament at the beginning of this forensic season, the size of the Interpretation Analysis entry was larger than 4 of the "usual" events.

RATIONALE/JUSTIFICATION FOR THE EVENT

O.K., so some students are interested in doing the event -- WHY should they be doing the event? One of the primary goals of forensics education is to provide the student with a variety of different communicative experiences. In order to achieve this goal, the Second National Conference on Forensics adopted a resolution which stated that "the forensic community should systematically propose, implement, test, and evaluate tournament formats, events, judge assignment procedures, and other aspects of tournament administration and disseminate the results of such studies."[5] The conference report went on to recommend measures for strengthening the educational goals of forensics.

Specifically, the report recommended that forensics should foster "students' ability to adapt to various communication contexts."[6] There is no doubt that Interpretation Analysis can challenge students and allow them to demonstrate their ability to adapt to various communication contexts. The event can achieve this goal, perhaps better than any other single event can. The event achieves this goal by placing the student, first, in the role/context of an interpreter -- someone who must take a piece of literature and convey it's narrative structure and emotional development to an audience. The student is then put into the role/context of a communicator -- someone who must not only be able to analyze a selection of literature for themselves, but must be able to create an understanding in the minds of their audience about what this analysis is and what it means. Finally, the student is placed in the role of a respondent -- someone who must, on the spur of the moment, be able comprehend a question being put to them, develop a response to that question, and communicate that response to an audience.

Perhaps the greatest benefit of this event is it's emphasis on the analytical aspects of interpretation. This is something which no other interpretation event provides. This is also something which has been greatly lacking in the current range of individual events being offered. As Michael Bartanen noted during the Second Annual Summer Conference on Argumentation:

> Greater emphasis should be placed on the analytic as opposed to the performance aspects of individual events in general, and oral interpretation in particular. Perhaps no event is as difficult to analyze from an argumentative perspective as the oral interpretation events. While interpretation events possess aesthetic values, it seems difficult to build an argument that performance-oriented events have particular value in teaching argument. For example, where is the argumentative value in an event entitled "comic book reading?" ....The argumentative value of oral interpretation comes from its role in enhancing a student's broad knowledge of aesthetic principles and standards. Exposing students to high quality literature presumably makes them better rounded, and thus, better educated individuals.[7]

But this event goes one step beyond. In most interpretation events, the student simply needs to learn the correct "formula" for that event. For example, a student in prose interpretation quickly learns that selections which win usually consist of cuttings written in the first person; having some dialogue; utilizing some humor; and ultimately leading to a dramatic ending. The process of "analysis" for this student consists of simply finding selections which fit that formula. The Interpretation Analysis event opens up a completely new realm of analytic understanding for the student. In this event, the

student must not only understand what was written and what interpretative choices they must make, but they are exposed to an entirely new world of criticism. They must now demonstrate that they understand techniques which allow them to also analyze WHY the author made the choices they did, or to understand WHY certain interpretive choices are made in performing this selection. No other forensic event allows students to fully demonstrate that type of understanding.

RANDOM NOTES AND THOUGHTS REGARDING THE EVENT

During the past two years, I've encountered a few issues and questions regarding this event that I'd like to briefly analyze below. Perhaps this discussion will help clear up some of the questions that you may have regarding the event.

Interpretation Analysis vs Literary Criticism

In the 1990 edition of Intercollegiate Speech Tournament Results, Seth Hawkins notes that:

> One of the cleverest new ideas of the season is Morehead's Interpretation Analysis, an event with an entire forensic

> progression in ten minutes: interp performance, then analysis, followed by judges' questions (like the old days in "crit."). Again, it's noble and novel, but may be too much to do in ten minutes. It is more integrated than those athletic events seen on late-night ESPN, where one must swim, bicycle and stack heavy cartons, in some order or another, or that Olympic event where one shoots a rifle while skiing. But it does faintly resemble that stuff. The abilities that Morehead wishes to test can be tested under the status quo simply by adding Literary Criticism, a long-existing event.[8]

I'm certain that Hawkins is often correct about many things, and I'm told that he always considers himself to be correct about everything; but I'm afraid that this time he missed the mark. A quick look at the rules for Literary Criticism will demonstrate why:

> Choose one literary work: poem, short story, novel, or play; no essays or journalism. Prove something of value about the work by using principles of literary criticism, although no overt methodology need be identified. Literary critics may be quoted as expert evidence. Summary and paraphrase of the quoted work should be minimal [emphasis added].[9]

There are two primary reasons why these events are dissimilar. First, one of the main features of Interpretation Analysis is the

performance of the selection being analyzed. The rules for Literary Criticism discourage the contestant from even quoting from the literature. A performance of the literature would appear to be totally inconsistent with the rules of Literary Criticism. The result is that you end up with one event, Interpretation Analysis, where the student is judged according to both oral interpretation AND public speaking criteria. In the other event, Literary Criticism, the only standard for evaluation is a public speaking criteria.

The second major difference between the events is that Literary Criticism only allows the student to analyze the literature itself. Interpretation Analysis, on the other hand, allows the student to analyze either the literature or the interpretive choices made in the performance of the literature. This would involve a completely different type of analysis.

A much simpler, and more logical, solution to this problem would be to combine Literary Criticism and Rhetorical Criticism just as the American Forensic Association has done with Communication Analysis. Tournaments could then offer Communication Analysis and Interpretation Analysis as competing events.

It's interesting to note that Hawkins may have silently acquiesced on this one. In previous issues of ISTR, Literary Criticism and Interpretation Analysis were listed as one category

in the EVENTS FREQUENCY table - the table of how often each event was offered throughout the year. In the 1991 ISTR, Literary Criticism and Interpretation Analysis are now listed as separate categories.

Different Formats for the Event

There has been a great deal of experimentation with different formats for this event. These experiments have even included the use of a duo, and even a trio, of students to perform an analysis of a particular selection. There have been two primary formats for the event which seem to have developed. One of these formats I refer to as the "traditional" format, and the other as the "POI" format. The traditional format involves the student performing a particular piece of literature, and then using some methodology to analyze either the literature or the interpretive choices.

The POI format is named after the Program Oral Interp event offered by the AFA in which the student develops a program of literature using more than one genre of literature centered around a particular theme. In Interpretation Analysis, this format arises when a student performs a particular selection and then, instead of analyzing the selection, gives a speech/analysis of the subject of the selection. The literature, in essence,

becomes a form of supporting material rather than the subject for analysis. For example, a student might read a segment of prose from the book Rape and Rescue of Kuwait, and then analyze the Gulf War, rather than the literature itself. While this can be a very creative and interesting exercise, I think it misses the point of the event. This type of format only demonstrates that a student knows how to use supporting material; something that's already being done in all other public speaking events. The purpose of Interpretation Analysis is to demonstrate that a student can analyze literature and/or interpretive performance; something which the POI format for this event does not do.

Question and Answer

Very few issues have generated as much controversy as the use of questions in forensic events. In addition to a panel at this convention dealing with the subject, there have been a number of papers written about the issue over the years.[10] The major concern with the use of questions in individual events competition seems to lie in the potential abuse which can occur when an "incompetent" judge asks a "stupid" question. While there certainly may be potential for some misuse and abuse of questions in individual events, the lack of questions may be hurting the pedagogical value of the activity. As Michael

Bartanen notes:

> One of the major factors which undermines the laboratory value of individual events is the absence of opportunities for refutation or other forms of feedback from the other competitors or the judge-critic....The learning which takes place from competitive individual events rounds is predominately experiential, which may or may not be the most beneficial type of learning for the student. Tournament practices also typically provide a judge with too little time to write comments on an individual events ballot which itself permits little flexibility to the critic to provide meaningful feedback or analysis of the student's performance."

While such procedures may be necessary to enhance the competitive experience in individual events, the lack of immediate oral feedback or effective written feedback undermines the optimal learning experience for both the student and the teacher.

While it may not be possible to totally eliminate the potential for misuse or abuse of questions in Interpretation Analysis, there are a couple of simple steps which could significantly reduce that potential for abuse:

1. Tournament Directors could do a better job of screening judges for the event. It seems that the greatest potential for abuse arises when someone who knows very

little about a particular event is asked to not only critique that event, but to also verbalize intelligent questions regarding that event. All tournament directors are familiar with the frustration of having to assign judges for an event without having any idea of who the judge is, what their preferences are, or what their expertise is. If tournament directors would simply ask on their entry forms for judges to mark those events which they DO feel comfortable judging or DON'T feel comfortable judging, a great deal of this uncertainty and confusion could be eliminated.

2. Make the question optional. There should be a statement in the rules of the event or in the instructions given to judges and contestants that makes it clear that judges have the OPTION of asking a question of the contestant, but that they are not REQUIRED to do so. In talking to others who have judged the event, some of them have confided to me that they sometimes felt pressured to ask a question; they felt that they were expected to do so. This may have caused some of them to ask lower quality questions. If there had been a specific statement which made it clear that judges were not required to ask questions, then they may not have felt compelled to do so.

CONCLUSION

Interpretation Analysis is a new and interesting event on the forensics horizon which appears to be attracting on ever larger number of supporters. Future research regarding this event should take a look at exactly how this support is growing, what types of students are participating in this event, and what types of judging criteria are critics using for this event.

This is not an event that all students can, or even should, participate in. But for those students who seek a challenge, this event can provide an excellent opportunity to showcase a number of varied talents. This appears to be an event that's going to continue to gain support and be around for quite some time.

ENDNOTES

1. Seth C. Hawkins, ISTR 91: The National Pastime - Intercollegiate Speech Tournament Results 1991 (New Haven: Great Eastern Forensic Services, 1991) 36.

2. Information regarding which tournaments have offered the event can be found in Seth C. Hawkins, Intercollegiate Speech Tournament Results 1989, (New Haven: Great Eastern Forensics Services, 1989); Seth C. Hawkins, ISTR 90: Intercollegiate Speech Tournament Results - Your 1990 Star Charts, (New Haven: Great Eastern Forensic Services, 1990); and Seth C. Hawkins, ISTR 91: The Rational Pastime - Intercollegiate Speech Tournament Results 1991, (New Haven: Great Eastern Forensic Services, 1991).

3. Aquarius XXIII Tournament Invitation, (Muncie: Ball State University, 1991).

4. Eagle Championships Tournament Invitation, (Morehead, KY: Morehead State University, 1991).

5. Donn Parson (Editor), American Forensics in Perspective, (Annandale: Speech Communication Association, 1984), 44.

6. Parson 46.

7. Michael D. Bartanen, Are New Events Needed to Enhance a Laboratory Experience in Argumentation?. In, Dimensions of Argument: Proceedings of the Second Summer Conference on Argumentation (Annandale: Speech Communication Association, 1981) 412.

8. Seth C. Hawkins, ISTR 90, 8.

9. 23rd Owl Forensic Tournament Invitation, (Southern Connecticut University, 1990) 5.

10. See for example Sellnow and Hanson, NFJ, vol. 8, 189-194; Green and Schnoor, NFJ, vol. 8, 195-198; Gorsline, NFJ, vol. 3, 166-168; Levasseur and Dean, NFJ, vol. 7, 151-158; Manchester, NFJ, vol. 3, 168-173; O'Rourke, NFJ, vol. 3, 163-165; Reynolds, NFJ, vol. 3, 173-175.

11. Bartanen, 408.

Appendix A

Information Given to Interpretation Analysis Judges at the Ball State University Tournament, October 25-26, 1991.

INTERPRETATION ANALYSIS

[4 minute maximum interp; 4 minute maximum public address; 2 minute maximum impromptu Q & A] Students will present an interpretation selection from any of the three major genres. After the selection, students will provide an original speech analyzing the interpretive choices in the selection. This analysis may be made in terms of historical background, technique, pedagogical value, or any other means used to bring life to the selection. A session will follow in which the judges may bring the ballot to life through a question and answer exchange with the contestant. Remaining Q & A time (if available) will be opened to audience members. This event counts toward any leg of the pentathlon competition.

Thoughts on judging IA

Time - Students should have timing of the interpretation and public address sections worked out to eight minutes total. This time may be distributed between the two in any number of ways, but they should conclude both portions within eight minutes.

Question and Answer - This section is intended to bring the ballot to life. Questions should not be asked to try to "trip the students up," but rather to clarify questions you would otherwise simply ask on the ballot. If there is Q & A time remaining after the judge has asked questions, the floor should be opened to other audience members. Time signals may or may not be used by judges.

Appendix A (Cont.)

Above all, I.A. is meant as an event to encourage freedom and thought about what we do in competitive speech. There should be no "set formula" for success in this event, but rather, any number of possible successful means of analyzing discourse.

Appendix B

Rules for Interpretation Analysis Used by the

Morehead State University Eagle Championships,

January 25-26, 1991

INTERPRETATION ANALYSIS

4 minute maximum interpretation, plus 4 minute maximum analysis, plus 2 minute maximum questions and answers. Speakers will present an oral interpretation selection from a published work of prose, poetry, or drama with literary merit. Use of manuscripts will be required. After the interpretation, the student will provide a 4 minute memorized oral speech (with standard format of introduction, body, conclusion) which analyzes the interpretive choices in the selection. This analysis may be made in terms of historical background, technique, educational value, or any other means of literary and/or performance criticism.

A session will follow in which judges will conduct a question and answer exchange with the contestant. Remaining question and answer time (if any) will be open to audience members. This event will involve all three disciplines of competitive speech (interpretation, public speaking, limited preparation) and may be counted as any one of these for Pentathlon. It will qualify as Rhet. Crit. for NFA.